

	Jean Michel Cousteau, President, Ocean Futures Society, California
MARINE DEBRIS	<p>According to the Gulf of Mexico Program, October 1991, marine debris is trash in the ocean or any manufactured object accidentally or purposely put into the marine environment such as: cans, bottles, rope, packing materials, bags, sheeting, fishing lines and nets, net fragment, trawl webbing, cargo strapping bands; six-pack rings; and other man-made items.</p> <p>Marine debris represents the foremost natural resource management problem at the Padre Island National Seashore located a few miles south of Corpus Christi, Texas and includes aesthetics and impacts to marine mammals, birds and reptiles from entanglement and ingestion. Additionally, toxic chemicals and medical waste wash ashore and pose a safety hazard to the visiting public.</p>
MARPOL	<p>In 1987, the U.S. joined thirty-nine other nations in signing the Plastics Act, thus ratifying Annex V of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships. These laws became known as MARPOL. This treaty bans the dumping of certain garbage by vessels at sea. It also limits the dumping of other vessel-generated garbage to specific distances from shore.</p> <p>According to the U.S. Coast Guard and MARPOL regulations, plastics (food and non-food contaminated) and noxious liquid substances (bulk carriage) are not allowed to be discarded from vessels anywhere at anytime. In other words, there is to be no dumping of these materials anywhere in any ocean waters.</p> <p>Trash (non-plastic) has no discharge from 0–3 nautical miles (nm) of the shoreline and from 3–12 nm discharge is not permitted unless it is ground to less than one inch. Discharge is permitted from 12-50 nm. Hazardous substance discharge is not allowed unless permitted under Annex II of MARPOL.</p> <p>The U.S. Coast Guard is a major party responsible for enforcement of such policies as MARPOL. They patrol our waters, as best they can, to ensure no illegal dumping is occurring. Other agencies such as the National Park Service also enforce rules regarding improper disposal of man-made waste left on our beaches by visitors to our national parks.</p>

<p>What all this is dealing with is ocean based sources of marine debris. Land based sources of marine debris can be cleaned using several methods. Corpus Christi Mayor, Lloyd Neal, on July 10, 1997 at a “Meeting with the Mayor” mentioned that our drainage system does not work properly because of all the trash and litter that finds its way into the gutters. This garbage winds up in our bay, the gulf, and on our shores because of the problems it (the trash) poses on the drainage system.</p> <p>There are numerous organizations that do their part to clean our shores and waters. The Padre Island National Seashore has employees who clean the seashore seven days a week. Adopt-A-Beach has a chapter in Corpus Christi that sponsors programs aimed at cleaning our beaches as well. Nueces County and the City of Corpus Christi also have programs aimed at ridding our shores of garbage. Along portions of North Padre Island, workers are out on their bulldozers every morning removing Sargassum and marine debris from large areas of our shores. If anyone has ever seen any coastlines in America and most of the world, they may agree with the authors in saying that our shoreline along the entire Coastal Bend is among the filthiest in all of the country.</p> <p>These organizations cannot win this war against beach garbage alone. Our beaches and our coastline need everyone to work together, collectively, to make our region beautiful.</p> <p>Prevention <i>What can be done to prevent marine debris?</i></p> <p>There are many ways in which individuals can help with the vast problem of marine debris. The easiest way is to not add to the problem while visiting the beach. Throw all your litter in the proper disposal areas. Also be sure that when you take your garbage to the street corner for collection, have only those items allowed in landfills in the dumpsters. Dispose of all oil and other hazardous materials in the proper and legal fashion. Recycle all material that is labeled with recycling codes.</p> <p>These actions seem to be common sense, however, it will take more than individuals taking personal responsibility to achieve these goals. Our community needs volunteers and civic organizations to participate in beach cleanup events. These should occur more often than the twice a year cleanups already in progress.</p>
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There are organizations such as Keep Texas Beautiful, Inc, located in Austin, Texas, which organize beach cleanup events. Padre Island National Seashore is also very active in this issue and they presently are working on several studies aimed at identifying the sources of marine debris and what the public perceives as marine debris. Contact the Padre Island National Seashore for more information on this study and how you can help. The Texas Adopt-A-Beach Program, organized through the Texas General Land Office, describes the various problems caused by the presence of plastics and trash in the marine environment and offers programs that are primarily concerned with beach cleanup.

John Rawls, in A Theory of Justice (1971), states that each generation has an obligation to future generations to preserve and protect our natural resources. Rawls argues that no one generation has a stronger claim on any natural resource than another. The problem with this idea lies in the willingness, or lack thereof, of present generations to respect the claims of future generations. Mankind is inherently self-interested (selfish) and lacks respect for other human beings, not to mention the lack of respect many humans have toward other living creatures.

CONCLUSION

If we as a society do not change our behaviors as related to our environment and one another, our children and grandchildren will not have the same simple pleasures we have, such as taking a safe, relaxing stroll along the shore. For further information and for ways you can become involved, contact your local officials (city council member, county commissioner, congressional representative [state or federal] or senator) and encourage them to support bills that will give more funding for enforcement of the laws already on the books. The laws are there, it is our responsibility to make sure they are enforced.

CLOSING REMARKS AND NEXT STEPS:
TAKING ACTION AGAINST MARINE DEBRIS

Daniel J. Basta, Director, National Marine Sanctuary Program,
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Now that the conference has ended, I have been asked to address the challenges before us: What we are seeing, how we can get the most out of our efforts so that this is not just another conference that winds up on “the shelf,” and about the timing of things to come. I encourage everyone to take the process seriously.

I would say that this conference did better than most in terms of actually presenting useful material, clearly articulating some recommendations, and generating some operational information. Often times, within the structure of large groups, little real progress takes place. Neither agencies nor individuals truly believe in the structure or the process, and one wonders why they even come.

Hawai’i is a long way from the mainland, and perhaps that’s why things seemed different here. I saw a real commitment from people to give up their own “devices” and to work through the process, patiently and diligently, in order to cure the difficulties we face. In addition to these observations, I learned several things. I gained a real appreciation of the scale, scope, severity, and nature of the problem of marine debris.

With respect to the challenges that await us, there are certainly challenges with respect to the document itself. The first step is complete. You have worked extraordinarily diligently to hammer out these recommendations, which was done in the heat of contact and pressure. Now you will have to go back and review this work, and add more value to it. The best way to do that is to review it in the quiet of your offices, and think through the details that may have escaped you while you were here working in groups. We will facilitate this with a web site primarily for conference participants. The address is www.los.noaa.ghost/debrisresults. The purpose, really, is to discover and extract the “pearls” of this conference, the philosophy behind these recommendations, and how to make them a reality.

This brings me to the proceedings document which will serve as the “raw material” with which we shall begin to effect the changes that we have discussed. These proceedings are going to be substantial and valuable in terms of the content.

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Once the document is published, the real challenge begins: Getting it to the right places and into the hands of the right people. The Ocean Commission, for example, will be established in January 2001. This will be the first U.S. commission on the oceans since the Stratton Commission met in 1969, and the nation will be looking to the commission for guidance in solving problems related to the coasts and oceans. We should be able to hand them the proceedings for concrete recommendations, on the national and international scales, with respect to the problem of marine debris.

Thus, your challenge is to assure that you make an impact in those areas that will be touched by an organization such as the Ocean Commission. This includes taking some responsibility for distributing the document—even hand carrying it to the people who are in a position to make a difference policywise and budgetwise. You can, of course, also refer them to the web site when it is launched for public use.

This web site is going to be more than a place to publish documents. It will be dynamic, and may, for example, allow experts and others around the world to register incidents of marine debris, discuss the issue, and share information to help resolve it.

The ramifications are far reaching, and the good news is that this program is committed to such a web site. This could become a truly effective mechanism, but again, it is up to you: It will go nowhere unless you "market" its effective use.

I also challenge you to make a real commitment to the issue by working with WestPac and the State of Hawai'i on the quarterly newsletter, so that you are not only aware of, but also contributing to, what is happening "on the ground" in terms of the issues. We are also committed to having another conference in two years, which is a reasonable time frame to begin to demonstrate to ourselves that we are making a difference. The extent to which this is going to work, however, essentially depends upon your support.

Nevertheless, I wish to make something clear. Nothing is going to happen very fast or, I should say, it's very unlikely that anything is going to happen fast. When one wishes to effect change, the first thing to do is to get the world into the right "rhythms," if you will, to accept change. This takes an amount of time that is generally out of tune with one's desire for "immediate gratification." In other words, six months from now if you look back, you will be disappointed. Don't make that mistake. Instead, consider that now, you have the opportunity to get involved with like-minded individuals, who, together, have the potential to make the world change its "beat." I would argue that this alone could take several years.

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So I ask of you: Be patient, be persistent, and keep the faith. If you do, we should be able to look back five years from now and say, "Look at all the things we have done. Look at how we have changed the contest. Look at the programs that are now in place."

To this end, I'll leave you with a short-term challenge—some "homework," so to speak. When you return to your offices and all of the many things you have to deal with there, things that will absolutely distract you from the goals you have voiced today, set aside one day to forward the action of this conference. On that day, call three people and tell them what a great conference this was. Tell them that there are some new expectations, and that recommendations are forthcoming. Then tell them that you'd like to follow up with them to see what they think. If you find that you can't make the time to do this, then it's possible that you are more committed to other issues than you are to this one.

Believe me, if you do this it will work. In terms of how we in the "ocean community" do business these days, the power of the community is at an all-time high. The system and the institutions want to do the right thing. For the most part, they need to be told what that is. And it is really completely up to us. We can't blame the state, and we can't blame the bureaucrats. We can only blame ourselves if we don't keep the faith and make the commitment to put the answers in front of the people who matter. We can already point to certain successes; this conference is one of them. To me, it was a revelation. We're off to a great start, now it's time to go the distance.

- Transcribed from a speech given August 11, 2000.

THE WAY FORWARD

‘Akau’ola, Secretary for Fisheries, Kingdom of Tonga

Tulou, tulou, tulou.
Tapu moe Eiki Sea,
Tapu mo Hawai’i moe ‘otu toputapu ‘oku nau totofa ‘ihe fonua ‘eiki ni,
Tapu moe kau fakafofonga kotoa,
Pea talangata ‘ia te au ‘o fai ki tu’a mama’o,
Kae ‘ata ke fai atu ‘ae fakahoha’a ni.

No one who was privileged to witness the reefs of the Pacific come alive in this hall or who has heard the anguished cries of the inhabitants as they suffered from man’s thoughtless and wanton destruction of the oceans can remain unmoved by their plight. For in the end, their plight is ours. In the creation it was preordained that our destiny would be linked to our oceans until the end of time. All life is dependent on this one great resource which we neglect at our peril.

The story of our reefs and the many sea creatures that live out their lives in surroundings that are already dangerous enough without our deadly contribution is as thought provoking a story as I have experienced in a very long time. It is a hauntingly beautiful tale told with the clarity that only a child could command, so that grown-ups such as us might begin to understand.

So how will we answer this cry from the heart? How will we send our youth home? What comfort can we provide? And what is the message that we in turn might wish them to convey to their peer groups from this great gathering? Will it in return be a message that is uplifting? Will it speak of hope, of determination, of courage? Will it be interwoven with the best that science has to offer? Underwritten by the captains of industry? Safeguarded by those in uniform that protect our shores? Will it be in the language of diplomacy, silver tongued that it might easily cross every frontier? Will it bear the imprint of the great departments of state? Will it be sent forth with the blessings of our legislatures? And will it carry the conviction of those in society that toil long hours only out of concern for the marine life whose well-being we the majority totally disregard?

The fruits of our labors of this passing week give us the courage to confirm that we might make such an honest pledge. That we, with assurance and conviction, confirm to our young ambassadors that the pleas and the warnings so eloquently conveyed to us have been heard and will be acted upon. Let them return home comforted that their mission was discharged with honor and with a warmth and humor all too often lacking when adults turn to address matters of great importance. Let them in turn carry our message and give heart to the youth of the Pacific, the wider international community, and the generations

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that will follow that their inheritance will not be empty and void, a worthless coin debased of all value by the guardians of today. Let the youth of our generation and the custodians of the future know that we welcome them to our ranks to stand shoulder-to-shoulder facing the great challenge of our times. Let them also know that we are sorry for our neglect.

So where do we start and how might we be able to carry forward the efforts begun some fifteen years ago? It is entirely appropriate that our youth have played such a prominent role in identifying and highlighting the problems and the issues, for real and lasting change will only follow if built on solid foundations of education, training, and awareness at every level of society. We need to build the bridges of collaboration, the foundations of which have already been so well laid out at this meeting, and internationalize the issue of derelict fishing gear within the wider context of marine debris. The great organs of diplomacy within the United Nations institutions and other international and regional bodies must begin to play a fuller role in coordinating and continuing the process. But that is not to say that we abrogate and surrender our responsibilities, for our roles will become more important as the great debate develops to ensure that local commitment and solutions are not lost.

We need to continue the links that were discussed here this week, to reach out and join with others who deal with related issues such as the reefs project, the multinational consultations to establish a tuna fisheries management regime for the Western and Central Pacific to name but two. MHLC, by which the negotiating process has become known, will hopefully be brought to a successful conclusion in this very hall some two weeks from now. We must not allow the equator to be the dividing factor between north and south; nor must the continents divide east for west. We need to be more aware of the institutions of our larger region who have been mandated with issues that are central to the environment, to fisheries, and to the social and economic well-being of our peoples. We need to engage the Pacific Rim countries through mechanisms that have already been established. We need to engage our scientists so as to allow for a better flow of information and to encourage closer cooperation. We need to link the fishing communities and encourage their participation and commitment so that they do not feel that they are the cause of all that has gone wrong. That is particularly true today of the fishing community of Hawai’i whose pain I, as a fisheries manager, feel and share.

We have addressed these issues. We have agreed to the solutions. We are armed with the plan. What remains is the strength of our personal commitment. How can we take back the vitality and strength of our convictions when the memory of our shared experiences and the inspiration we provided for each other in these rooms become dimmed with the passing of time? The advent of technological progress with e-mail and www.com is part of the answer. Sharing our successes and our problems will do much since the level of knowledge and wisdom represented at this meeting is awesome. Knowing that others are applying